

August 22, 1973

Mr. Peter Steinfels
Editor
The Hastings Center Studies
Institute of Society, Ethics and the Life Sciences
623 Warburton Avenue
Hastings-on-Hudson, New York 10706

Dear Sir,

In Marc Lappe's article, Vol. 1, Number 2, at page 65 I am quoted as having asserted "the need to contain DNA lesions that are introduced into the gene pool". Such a formulation obfuscates the fact that these lesions do not exist in vacuo but are in fact genetic aberrations carried by human individuals." I can understand the temptation to create a straw-man in order to give greater force to an argument, but this is hardly an ethical way to deal with the propositions of one's colleagues. Why did he not also quote other sentences from the same paper? "It is so difficult to do only good in such matters that we are better off putting our strongest efforts into the prevention of mutations, so as to minimize the heavy moral and other burdens of decision once the gene pool has been seeded with them." In making such narrow attributions, Dr. Lappe is arrogating to himself a unique sensitivity to the complexity of the problems of human genetics that is in fact shared by most of his colleagues. Certainly there is nothing in my article that would support the implied suggestion of quarantining or otherwise reproductively isolating those individuals carrying DNA lesions. The main thrust of my article and much of my other recent writing on this subject has been to stress that it is the alleviation of individual distress that must be the focus of our concerns in this field.

I am enclosing a copy of this piece, which I can readily make available to you for reprinting if you wish to give your readers the opportunity of a more precise rendition of my views.

Sincerely yours,

Joshua Lederberg
Professor of Genetics

JL/rr
Enclosure